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SOMALIA ON THE HORN

A Counterpoint of Problems Confronting One of Africa's New Nations

by E. A. Bayne

Part V: The Italians

March 15, 1960

An admiral of the medieval Ming Empire of China once visited the Horn of Africa only to report to his emperor that "it wasn't worth the effort." Although it is more than possible that the Italians were aware of the admiral's reaction, they joined (a trifle tardily) the empire builders of the 19th century, settling in what the other European powers had left of East Africa and following much the same pattern as their predecessors, notably in Somalia and Eritrea. Of course, Italian explorers had been investigating the continent since the 13th century, but in modern history the national effort had to await the creation of a unified Italy which was not complete until 1870.

The Italians established a series of trading posts along the southern reaches of the Somali coast, in the richer area of the two rivers, replaced the disintegrating Arab fiefdoms of the Sultan of Zanzibar in the coastal towns, and carried on a mildly profitable trade in ivory, hides and skins. The formula was much the same for all the powers whose early imperialism in Africa was largely in

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the hands of mercantile interests: a "chartered" agency was formed with quasi-governmental responsibilities. In Somalia's case, it was the Benadir Company, named for the southern region of the territory. (One form of competition with other such companies operating in East Africa followed another, and they engaged more and more in the exciting tactics of imperialistic intrigue.) A contemporary foreign minister of Italy once pointed out that the Benadir Company was founded because "the Government did not want to spend much money on that Colony, and this way out of the difficulty was found as a means of keeping the Colony, while putting off the real solution of the problem to the distant future."[1]

By the 1890's, the European colonial rivalry in Africa was at a high pitch, and the Italians joined in. By 1896, the idea of using an imperialistic war to bolster faltering domestic political fortunes had occurred to the Italian ministry (although not with Italian unanimity) and an invasion of Ethiopia was undertaken. The Emperor Menelik, with spear-carrying horsemen but sufficient 19th-century artillery, met the Italian invaders at Aduwa and soundly defeated them. The Italian Government (of aging Francesco Crispi) promptly fell, a victim of its inability to cope with the effects of Italy's delayed industrial revolution, and of a military disaster. Wiser Italian politicians had pointed out that Eritrea and Somalia could represent only less than break-even investment to Italy at a time when Italy itself required industrialization, but more imperialistic councils pointed out that the British were pressing from the South, the French entertained hopes of connecting Dakar in West Africa with their enclave on the Horn by a vast sandy band across the continent, and that Italy's national dignity was involved. Moreover, there were the happy slogans about the Christian mission of civilization and the holy task of ending slavery.

The inevitable mutation in British policy from purely mercantile interests in East Africa to national colonial responsibility (perhaps largely as a result of the heroic work of F. J. D. Lugard) began to have collateral effects upon other European powers. By 1905, Italy began to exercise more direct control over its territory on the Horn. The Benadir Company was nationalized, territorial policies were co-ordinated with the British, a colonial budget was developed (in which surpluses from the administration of Eritrea would meet the deficits of Somalia), protectorates with native Somali chiefs were arranged which more or less concluded the previous leasing concordats with the Sultan of Zanzibar. Somalia became, in the modern sense, an Italian colony. The need for a minimal economic development was recognized, as well as for the establishment of a colonial administration, but the development of ports, roads, and similar basic services was too costly for Italy to undertake on any large scale. Indeed, the policy laid down by the Foreign Minister in 1905 was explicit, and may be considered to have remained the Italian Government policy ever since:

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[1] Italy's Foreign and Colonial Policy, by Sen. Tommaso Tittoni, New York, 1915. (I am indebted to Prof. Manfred Vernon, of the University of Alabama, for this reference.)

"My program [he said in Parliament] is, therefore: Reorganization of the colony, no increase of burden for the taxpayers."[2] And he added: ". . . but until such time as Parliament shall have decided for the relinquishment of the Colonies, it is the duty of the Government to hold them and administer them properly in the interests and for the dignity of the nation."

It was not to be the responsibility of the Italian Parliament to decide upon the "relinquishment" of Somalia or other Italian colonies; the decision rested with the victors of World War II. Until 1941, when the British took over the administration of Somalia and set in train the independence movement which is to result in statehood for the territory in July of this year, the Italians administered Somalia under a general policy that had its distinct limiting characteristics.

Basically, perhaps, the most limiting factor was economic. Somalia offered only a limited economic opportunity to Italian colonists. It was necessary to provide not only skills but also a very high level of public investment to bring agricultural development to a productive stage, and only the most automatically rewarding projects were undertaken, such as banana plantations on the banks of the Juba and Webbi Shebeli. There was no mineral wealth to encourage industrial enterprise, cotton growing collapsed during the depression of the 1930's, and most Italians engaged in factoring what native products there were. Moreover, the existence of the two rivers in the southern region emphasized a somewhat lopsided settlement of the territory since the north was left to its nomads and indigenous tribal economy. At no time in the history of Somalia as an Italian colony were there more than about 4,500 Italians (excepting only the period when it was used in the 1930's as a staging area for the conquest of Ethiopia). The administrative policy which grew out of this economic reality was to leave the native political and social institutions largely undisturbed, and superimpose upon the Somali way of life a noninterfering protectorate. A system of administration was established, involving district and regional political officers under whom all matters of public security (as well as foreign affairs and economic development) were conducted. In form it followed the British colonial system, but it lacked the philosophy of "indirect rule" enunciated by Lugard.

Even the agricultural settlement which Italians undertook was to have only a limited effect upon the surrounding Somalis. In general, Italians requiring labor for harvesting and other operations dealt with the district officer of the Italian administration, who in turn arranged with a local chief for the labor needed. This is known in British colonies as "contract labor" (and sometimes "forced" labor), and while in Somalia it probably retarded the economic growth of the Somali population because the system produced the cheapest form of labor, and was easily enforced by agreement between the local official and the tribal chief (or by government fiat), it was the system used in most of Africa until the beginning of World War II when a greater productivity of African labor suddenly became essential to the Allied cause.

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[2] Tittoni, op. cit.

The Cathedral in Mogadiscio.

The visitor to Somalia today, coming from an Italy that has tried to forget the stultifying disaster of fascism and has removed as many obvious outward symbols of it as is feasible, is shaken by the absurd and pompous relics of fascism in Somalia. There are triumphal arches in Mogadiscio commemorating the East African empire, each kilometer marker on the principal highways is a stone fasces, as is the balustrade of the port marina in the city. The largest building in the capital, now the Somali Parliament, was the national Fascist headquarters with ample space for Blackshirt parades, and a balcony for speechmaking. The Catholic cathedral has two memorial tablets on its porch, celebrating the Vatican concordats of 1929 and "the felicitous reign of Pius XI, Pope; H.M. Victor Immanuel II 'the Victorious'; Duce of Italy and of Fascism, Benito Mussolini." The tie of Church and State so signified may be a footnote to an understanding of present-day Italy.

The Church, however, after decades of effort that bore some relationship in its limitations to Italy's colonial policy, finally recognized that the conversion of the Muslim Somalis was not easy, and reduced its efforts so that in recent years it has cared chiefly for the resident Italians, although Christianizing their casual mixed-blood offspring in Church-run orphanages and schools. Later, when the British administration admitted them as the Italians had not, American Protestants took up the cause, and the Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses opened educational and medical mission stations in the northern area of the country.

As there are still monuments of the Fascist regime, I wondered if there were not still a few settlers to whom the false grandeur of the Italian impero might still appeal. I lunched one day with a senior Italian friend, a director of Somalia's sugar industry, who is a liberal-minded ex-diplomat.

We were in the dining room of Mogadiscio's main hotel, the Croce del Sud.

"Yes, indeed," he replied when I asked him if some of the old Fascists were still around, "there are too many for my taste. You see them come in here, order the waiters around like martinets, and if they don't get the service they think they deserve they begin to shout angrily. We had one here yesterday, a banana planter from upriver. He became difficult and when the manager remonstrated, he shouted: 'I guess if I spoke English I would have some service!' He never recovered from the war, I suspect, and that was almost twenty years ago here."

The nine years of British administration wrought changes among the Somalis, but it could not reduce the swagger of racial superiority and frustrated ultranationalism of some of these colonists. So I said to my friend:

"I have been struck on this short visit with the very light veneer seventy years of Italian colonialism seems to have left. Even in similarly poor colonies like the Gambia, the British built more of permanence, I think."

"Theirs is a different approach to colonial administration, as you know," he said, "but I think there is another reason also. The Fascists really believed that we would be here for a thousand years. There would be time for everything."

Lest I give the impression that Italians did nothing for the welfare of the Somalis during this period, and that the banana planters were all Fascist pensioners or rewarded military emigrés from the East African campaign (as some were), there is ample record to the contrary as many Somalis are quick to admit. There was the Italian mission doctor who established a leper colony on the Juba river, and ultimately died of the disease for his humanity; an early Italian Governor added much to the then limited knowledge of Somali anthropology by assiduous scholarly effort during his tenure. Most of these stories of charitable and productive work in Somalia have a peculiarly Italian aspect, however; they are the work of individuals rather than of institutions, as true a factor in Italy itself as in Somalia.

The most notable figure during the Italian administration of colonial Somalia was the Duke of Abruzzi, a cousin of the late King Victor Immanuel II, who had earned a wide reputation as an explorer and mountain climber (in Asia, particularly) during the early decades of this century. The Duke met and fell deeply in love with an American girl, a Miss Elkins, and hoped to marry her until the royal family intervened to prevent it. Presumably to assuage his romantic disappointment, the Duke went to Somalia and established a sugar cane industry, by far the largest and only industrialized project of its kind in the territory. Miss Elkins returned to America ultimately to marry somebody else while the Duke devoted himself to Somalia, and remained a bachelor. He is sentimentally honored still, his personal apartment has aspects of a shrine, and

the sugar industry is a major asset of the Somali economy.[3]

A review of the Italian role in Somalia would be incomplete without mention of the banana business. Bananas have been the principal activity of Italian investors and colonists for more than three decades, and for the beginning years of Somalia's independence, at least, the trade will be the mainstay of the state's external economy. The subject has its elements of contention both in Somalia and in Italy and remains a loose end in closing out the relationship between Italy and Somalia preparatory to statehood.

By 1935, the banana industry of Somalia had matured as a suitable alternative for Italian planters whose efforts to build a cotton industry were crushed by the effects of the Great Depression. In keeping with Fascist principles of state corporatism (and likely also in keeping with older principles of political patronage and protectionism), a royal decree created the Italian Banana Monopoly, adding to the already important number of ancient and more modern government monopolies (salt, tobacco, etc.) on which much of the Italian revenue is still based. The decree was reinforced in 1937, perpetuating the agency as the marketer for bananas from all Italian colonies. In 1960, the Monopoly deals chiefly in Somali fruit, and provides about 70 per cent of the total Somali export returns, worth about $10 million to the local balance of payments, and about $500,000 to the Somali budget through export duties. About 250 banana plantations participate, on a quota basis, and provide a local payroll for Somali labor of about $2 million annually.

Somali bananas are imported currently into Italy free of duty, except for a nominal one per cent customs handling charge while bananas from other areas must pay 40 per cent in duty. Although last year, Somali bananas were sold in small quantities to Greece, Italy provides the territory's major market since the protection provided by the Monopoly covers the rather high costs of the Somali industry. Somali products are initially expensive because there are few facilities in the country for the proper storage, transport, or even production of bananas in rhythm with European market demands. Somalia is more distant from the European market than other areas, and ships carrying the fruit generally travel light to Somalia, since the import market of the country is underdeveloped. Moreover, its bananas are of a variety that is

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[3] Now owned by a Genoan sugar corporation, the project has some marketing problems for its sugar, being far from European consumers and competitive in East Africa with British sugar producers, but it still represents an important investment, being 10,000 hectares of irrigated plantation, and a good example of the industrial process in technical, managerial and marketing aspects. Base wages (it no longer engages contract labor) are low, about 28-42 cents (US) per day, with a varying range of other benefits, which in view of productivity limitations and market competition is comparable with similar enterprises in East Africa. The Italian management expects to remain in Somalia after independence, although a minimal program of "somalization" has been inaugurated. A domestic tax on sugar is a not unimportant source of government revenue.

easily bruised and requires a higher packing cost than other types, although it does have the advantage of certain disease-resistant qualities. Somalia has plans for the development of the main banana port at Chisimaio in the south, but even when this has been accomplished, the country will still have to cope with its fact of geography.

Within Italy, the Monopoly has become a profitable agency for the Italian Government. In 1959, for example, it turned in a net return to the Italian Ministry of Finance, which is its parent ministry, of more than $13 million, a profit exacted from the Italian consumer who pays more than 34 cents a pound at retail. Observers note that the high retail price restricts the consumption of the fruit, and point out that eliminating the high Italian Government profit is one means of lowering the price and broadening the market, but there are other means as well: more efficient production of bananas in Somalia; cheaper freight rates (there have been charges the Monopoly pays higher rates than necessary as a means of political largess); and a narrower spread for wholesalers in Italy to whom concessions are granted under a system that does not provide for open bidding.

Periodic "exposés" of the Monopoly in the Italian press in recent years have charged widespread corruption and government price-gouging in the activities of the Monopoly. For Somalia, however, the existence of the agency remains a protection for its basic export. The Italian Government has therefore been in something of a dilemma. It can continue the Monopoly for Somalia's sake and for the sake of the Somalia budget which is in continuing deficit. There are strong pressures in favor of the Monopoly. Its profits have, at least indirectly, covered Italy's contribution to its trusteeship of Somalia (about $5.6 million annually) and in the future Italy will be committed to subsidize Somalia to the amount of about $3.6 million for technicians and budgetary contributions. On the other hand, if the Government, yielding to popular demands for cheaper bananas in Italy, should destroy the Monopoly, it would have to permit normal imports of bananas from nearer producers, such as Tunisia and West Africa. In that event, Italy would have relinquished a source of funds with which to subsidize Somalia and the Somali banana industry would be endangered before it had a chance to modernize and become more competitive.

So far, the Italian Government has informed the United Nations that it will "consider the absorption of the Somali banana crop" after independence, a commitment that may mean much or little for Somalia, and for the Italian consumer. Informal opinion in Rome and in Mogadiscio at present indicates that whatever decision is made it will not be unwarrantedly abrupt. In addition, the banana industry of Somalia is the principal basis for the new state's potential association with the European Common Market, since Somalia was included under Italy's membership in the Six under the Treaty of Rome. Should Somalia elect to participate in the European Common Market, it would become eligible (as are many French territories under the same provisions of the treaty) for various forms of capital assistance. Preferential

treatment on tariffs would be guaranteed the Somalis and they would be permitted to maintain their individual tariffs with non-Common Market countries.

As a short study produced by the staff of the Economic Commission for Africa recently pointed out, association of Somalia with Europe, which is a legacy from the Italians, involves two aspects in opposition. "The first is the extent of trade diversion provoked by the new preferential arrangements and the second the possible effects of the acceleration of economic development in the Six Countries on their demand for primary products."[4] At least one Italian has undertaken to carry on an information program concerning the Common Market and has established an association for that purpose in Mogadiscio. This via the banana trade, if presenting one more problem for Somali decision, is not the sum of the Italian legacy, however.

There are various estimates of the post-World War II effect upon Somalia of the Italian presence. Perhaps the most succinct was that of the Somali whose couplet, "primo amaro, ora caro" summed it up for the Somali elite. Most Italians and others seem to think that the use of Italian as a second language will soon disappear in favor of English[5] and in view of the immediate heritage of the ruling Somalis from the British occupation, it can be assumed that more aspects than this will be changed, and not entirely as a response to British patterns but also as a result of the increasing American presence in the country and the "protector" image the United States will increasingly assume after Somalia independence.

The assumption of the Trusteeship for Somalia by Italy was not unanimously favored by Italian officialdom. One Italian diplomat, who was connected with African affairs at the time (1949), reported that "75 per cent of the Foreign Office was opposed to being involved again." The project represented only cost to Italy, of treasure and of useful manpower, which a recuperating Italy could ill afford at the time, even though whatever monetary cost it represented was being made up many times by contributions from the Marshall Plan. Nevertheless, as a result of British and American pressure (neither wishing to undertake the role of trustee) to prevent any further suggestions of Russian administration, the Italians were prevailed upon to assume the United Nations responsibility. There were those in Italy who felt then, as they do now, that national dignity as a great power demanded it.[6]

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4 The Impact of the European Economic Community on African Trade, Economic Commission for Africa, E/CN.14/29, November 20, 1959, Addis Ababa.

5 While in Ethiopia, which does not have a common language as Somalia does, Italian has virtually become the lingua franca.

6 An ex-Italian diplomat once phrased Italy's major foreign policy problem in the postwar world as thus: "Italy cannot decide whether to be the last of the great powers or the first of the small ones! Until it does, it will always have a schizoid image."

According to several Somalis and some Italian officials in Mogadiscio, this ambivalent attitude toward the administration of Somalia has dogged the Italian presence in the territory since 1950. Earlier, a Somali minister told me, there had been a frank hope on the part of the returning Italian officials to recreate the previous colonial regime, to re-establish Italian trade dominance and even, if necessary, to buy political loyalties that had been awakened to the possibilities of Somalia's independence. The heritage of the British activity and the current effort of Egypt to fan Somali nationalism have been formidable obstacles to this Italian hope. Moreover, the terms of the trusteeship itself were clear, and its administration had been given a watchdog Advisory Commission, resident in Mogadiscio and composed of three representatives of small nations: the Philippines, Columbia, and importantly, Egypt. The Italians did what they could, and much of it was to Somalia's benefit. The banana industry, for example, had been dormant during the war and the British occupation, the British having encouraged the development of more diversified farming in the two river basins. Its reconstitution--not without problems--gave Somalia an important cash crop for export.

The effort to recreate the Italian image was natural enough, perhaps, and in many ways it called forth splendid efforts by Italian technicians, teachers, and administrators. By 1953, it had become clear to all Italians (and many had foreseen it earlier), that Italian colonialism would be too costly to be borne with equanimity by a government confronted with a major requirement for reconstruction and development at home. Moreover, the domestic needs were the more pressing because of a continuing existence of a 25 per cent Communist electorate. Italy's requests to the United States for economic aid for their trusteeship of Somalia became urgent and frequent. It was clear that an Italian decision had been finally accepted, and involved a triumph for the realists in the Italian Government over the unrealistic nationalistic proponents of colonialism.[7]

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My visit to Somalia came at a time when the Italians were attempting to "tidy up all the loose ends" of their trusteeship, as a British resident remarked. The events of the week had a charming Italianate quality in that there was a major effort to make a bella figura, as much for the Italian themselves as for the world at large. Nevertheless, there was evidence of progress and the expansive festivities had some justification.

The Italians had created a government, increased education and medical services, undertaken a program of public works, installed a legal frame-

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[7] In 1952-53, I happened to be administering American technical assistance and loan aid to European dependent territories, among which Somalia technically qualified, and was a point of contact with the Italian Government. A fuller discussion of this aspect appears in Part VI: The Americans, in this present series.

work that included sound basis for civil rights, had begun efforts to improve the status of women despite the Islamic ambiance, and had speeded up the creation of an educated elite on whom the burden of modern independent government would rest. They had been the instrument for the introduction of United States interest in the country, and had co-ordinated with a measure of success the varied activities of United Nations specialized agencies. While not solving the problems of Somalia's budgetary deficits, they had brought the territory's imports into balance with exports, and if the level was low, at least it was higher in absolute value than ten years ago. The economy was expanding at a faster rate than either Italy's own economists or those of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development had estimated as probable.[8] Whether these achievements would add up to being the necessary groundwork for a sufficiently mature state remained to be seen, but it had been a worthy effort by Italians, in whose ears likely still lingered the 1905 promise of economical colonialism. Italy has, perhaps, done the task of institution building. It remains for the Somalis themselves ultimately to fill the structure with social meaning.

Italy could not do everything. As the press officer for the trusteeship administration has written, Italy had not the image to solve Somalia's border problem with Ethiopia. "Italy had attacked and conquered Ethiopia. She had now to negotiate on behalf of her trustee-administered Somalia, having upon her shoulders the Fascist heritage. The psychological condition couldn't be worse and no result at all, of course, came out of the year-long Italo-Ethiopian negotiations. The political influence of Italy in East Africa today is almost nonexistent . . . ."[9] Nor was any result to come from the negotiations arbitrated by the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Trygve Lie, a year later (1959). But Italy was determined to leave Somalia with a ricordo caro. If it was no longer possible to be the colonialist of the Horn, it was feasible perhaps to enhance a new image as a friend of the emerging small nations, a hope in keeping with its intent of becoming a friendly broker between the Arab world and the West in the Mediterranean arena.

Late in 1958, Italy quietly proposed a maneuver in the Trusteeship Council of the UN: given the authority, Italy would decide unilaterally when statehood should be granted to Somalia. If this gambit had been successful, Italy could have speeded the date of independence which in 1949 had been provisionally set for the end of 1960. Italy would thus have reaped a small reward of Somali good will, but there were other nations (including the United States) competing for the role of friend to Somalia and the maneuver was defeated. However, since Italy had suggested advancing the date of independence, there

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[8] See Report of the Mission to the Trust Territory of Somaliland, IBRD, Washington, D. C., 1958; and Exigences Economiques du Territoire de la Somalie à l'Expiration du Mandat de Tutelle, Rome, 1958, (also in Italian).

[9] In Africa, Special Report, Vol. 3, No. 12, December, 1958, Washington, D. C. (a special issue devoted to Somalia and Independence).

was no alternative for any nation but to join in an earlier welcome for Somalia into the family. The General Assembly went through the necessary motions, and Somalia assumes the privileges and burdens of statehood on the first of July this year, six months early. The Italians promptly suggested the naming of a street in Mogadiscio, Via 18 Decembre, commemorating the date of the UN resolution.

The wording of the resolution was not, however, without mention of caution (and in the eyes of some observers, censure of Italian haste). It suggested that the present legislative base be broadened to include minor and opposition tribal interests in the making of a constitution, a phrase that implied some dissatisfaction with the allegedly corrupt manner in which the general parliamentary elections of 1959 had been conducted by the Somalis with the permission of, or at least, under the supervision of the Italian administering authority. The Italians duly transmitted the recommendation to the Somalis, but without much hope that the reform either would or could be made in the present political situation in Somalia. The Italian task had, in reality, been completed. What remained now was the "tidying up" and the festivities.

Of first importance in this process of closing out is the amount of contribution Italy will continue to make to Somalia. It has already indicated its willingness to supply technicians and scholarships, and some budgetary aid, and to consider the continuation of banana absorption. In Rome, the value of this commitment is estimated at not much more than about $3.6 million, or about $2 million less than the average of contributions made during recent years. The United States, aware of a so far unmeasured but presumably substantial deficit in the budget of the new state, has been pressing the Italians to increase this future contribution. Indeed, when President Eisenhower visited Rome last December on his way to Asia, this request was on his agenda in his talks with Italian Government officials. Regrettably, he obtained little satisfaction.

Italy's commitment in Somalia seemed destined to diminish, but if Italy could help it, it was not to do so without an effort to commemorate its very real and some not so real achievements.

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The Italian Trusteeship officials had opened a junior college-level center for law and political economy about four years ago as a basis of training future bureaucrats for the Somali government. Two years of local study as a minimum, and a year in an Italian university was the plan of study. They provided a faculty drawn chiefly from the universities of Rome and of Padua, augmented by occasional visiting lecturers from other institutions. In a sense, this university center in Mogadiscio represented the single most important training activity that had been undertaken, and, judging from the quality of faculty made available to it, the Italians thought so also. At the same time a Somali students center was established in Rome.

A new building had been constructed for the center in Mogadiscio, toward which the United States had contributed funds and books for a library, and it was on the occasion of the opening of the new facility that the Italians called a "Convention for the Study of International Co-operation in Africa," and invited participants from most African colleges and from Europe. The title of the meeting was so grandiose as to be somewhat suspect, and only seven non-Italian professors turned up although the fares of participants were paid by Italy. Only two Africans were among them, although the Belgian, British, and American delegates came from institutions located in Africa. The remainder of the audience was composed of diplomats, representatives of the United Nations and its agencies, the Committee for Technical Cooperation in Africa, and a large and not unimpressive group of Italian professors, including l'On. Giuseppe Bittiol, the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs in the present Italian Government and a political scientist of considerable standing, and l'On. Gaspare Ambrosini, a judge of the Italian Constitutional Court, and an excitable Sicilian renowned for his gift of old-fashioned oratory and his integrity. Several other members of the Italian Parliament were present, and also, depending upon the occasion as the sessions of the conference continued through the week, local officials of the UN Advisory Council and the trusteeship administration, Somali cabinet officers and notables. The biggest attraction was to be the arrival of Dag Hammarskjold, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who was to make his second visit to Somalia and address the conference.

If there were not other evidences in the Italian story in Somalia, the convention revealed the antiphony of Italian policy: the realist and the nationalist, an objective and a subjective view which can also be the antiphon of Italy itself. Except for a few, rather dully toned speeches produced by the UN officials; an interesting announcement by a German professor (who was also a director of the German Africa Society) of an extensive program of technical assistance and other aid Germany was prepared to offer Somalia, as it had other new nations; and an extremely competent report by the acting head of the American Point IV mission: it was an Italian show. So Italian was it, that most sessions failed to produce any Somali students!

The UN Secretary-General addresses the conference.

The sessions opened in the presence of Italian Administrator, Mario di Stefano (formerly Italy's Ambassador to Russia and Canada, and during the war, the Fascist administrator of Montenegro) who always arrived with a fanfare from the police brass band. The head of the political science department of the University of Padua then gave what could have been, but was to be smothered in other rhetoric, an appropriate keynote address with at least one memorable phrase: "It shall be the responsibility of those who direct this university center to inculcate a love for justice and not for force . . . ." After a few other remarks from various officials, a quartet of students from Padua, dressed in their medieval student capes and hats, presented a banner to a group of Somali students "from its sister institution in Italy." It seemed a friendly and well-executed gesture and was taken as such.

The next day the convention organized. At the suggestion of the Italians, Justice Ambrosini, who was much the senior member (now approaching seventy-five) was elected the president as expected, and the only bona fide African professor who had arrived, a classics teacher from the University of Ghana,[10] was named vice president. This was followed by Justice Ambrosini's inaugural address, which lasted for two hours, and involved a full complement of oratorical pyrotechnics. The burden of it was to create an image of Italian beneficence in Africa, "with profound human sentiments arising from the heart," and to dispel any impression that Italians had been reluctant to take on the task of trusteeship and were eager to be rid of it. In its apologetic way, it seemed inappropriate, and appeared to irritate the bulk of the Italian contingent to the point where the ranking minister, l'On. Bettiol, took pains to apologize to the Somali director of the center. Ambrosini's talk was followed by similar apologia and finally by an Italian professor who delivered a 35-page paper on Italian activities in Africa which began with the 12th century, and which emptied the hall as it was approaching lunchtime. This was the low point of the convention, and rumors passed quickly that the Administrator, who as the governor of the territory retained an image of absolute power and responsibility, had been informed of the dissatisfaction of most of the participants. Moreover, it seemed odd that on this "Italian Day" at the meetings, no Somali students had been permitted to attend. In any event, the following days produced a more normal, if less remarkable, progress, enlivened by a speech given by the UN Secretary-General.

Hammarskjold's remarks avoided more than polite references to Somalia, but he did affirm the righteousness of the cause of the emerging nations of Africa without dwelling much on their responsibilities, or more importantly,

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[10] The Ghanaian subsequently delivered a paper on the record of technical assistance and aid received by his country from outside. To the surprise of most, he strongly advocated co-operation with Israel in virtually all fields (including military) based on the highly satisfactory record his country has had. Somalia has yet no policy on Israel, presumably, but the repeated statements of "Islamic solidarity" would indicate that it approaches the somewhat remote problem with an initial bias.

perhaps, upon the profound changes in the power structure of the United Nations the total of new states will make. The quality of blandness was almost stifling, I thought, and when he had finished my German colleague remarked drily:

"For a Swede, he was almost emotional!"

While Mogadiscio does boast a night club, complete with Somali dancing girls (there is also, inevitably, a minor industry of prostitution), there was little time for the exploration of its attractions for the convention delegates. Almost every evening produced a reception, at the residence of the Administrator (which would involve hundreds of people and the police band), at the Parliament, city hall, or at the United Nations compound. The Italian professors, having assured themselves that professional meetings in America or in other areas of Europe did not involve such elegance, began to grumble at the cost of the show which was rumored to be as much as $150,000, presumably chargeable to the Italo-Somali budget. For a nation emerging in a deficit financial position, they felt, it was a poor example to set; but it did have the advantage of providing an opportunity to meet the entire Establishment of Somalia several times, and to develop acquaintances that might not have been otherwise possible.

Toward the end of the ceremonies, the Somali students were increasingly admitted (although rarely more than 20-odd showed) and a few participated. An Italian-trained Somali economist gave a paper on some fiscal aspects of the new state which indicated a reasonable grasp of national accounts, and added to my increasing impression that Somalia was not altogether unprepared for independence. Another Somali student, who had been present at last year's Afro-Asian conference in Cairo, offered a report in which the Somali position of aloofness from the neutralist polemics of that meeting was clear. As this speech seemed a little out of tune with the now harmonious flow of technical program objectives, and economic and social discussions, I asked the Somali director of the center about it. He replied:

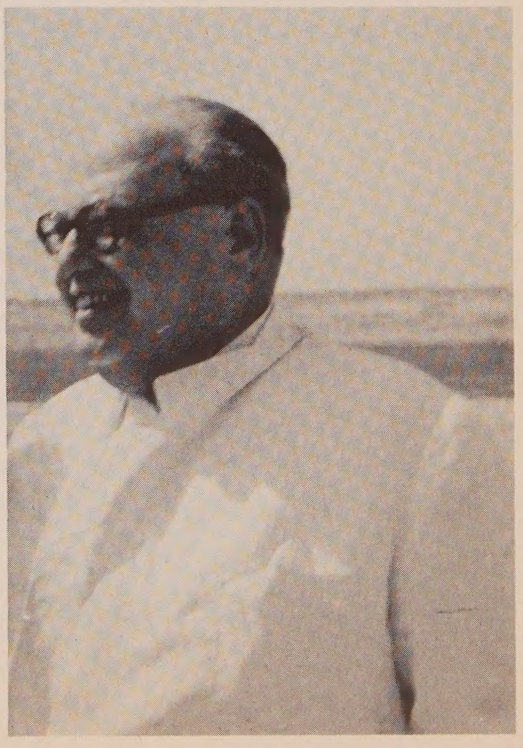
"The Italians never permitted any public mention of the Cairo conference at the time [the administration controls the one daily newspaper and the radio]. This was the first time any member of the delegation could report publicly."

For the foreigner, the convention produced little of novelty along its announced theme, but it did make possible a study of an antiphonal Italian ballet. The cast seemed to divide in at least two ways. There was the broad divergence in style between the southern Italians (and notably Sicilians) and the northern, which is, of course, also a characteristic of official Italy; and a distinction in outlook between younger and older functionaries--those who had grown up under fascism and those whose officialdom came later. The younger Italian officials, technical and administrative, whom I met in Somalia appeared to be free from the psychological need for making a gro-

tesque bella figura for its own sake or to glorify the international role of Italy. This is not to report a lack of patriotism, or a new cynicism, but it is to note a more pragmatic view and sense of security that the pomposities of ultranationalistic fascism belied. For them, the work of Italy in Somalia was there to see, for good or ill, and their reply to the stranger's first query: "Are the Somalis ready for independence?" would likely be realistically hopeful. The older generation is far less sanguine about the future, their replies are likely to be prefaced by emotive old chestnuts about Somalis still being "children" or "too close to savagery." Moreover, another mark of distinction between young and old, although less clear and certain, is in color prejudice, but this must be viewed in a Somali context.

Actually, the terms of the trusteeship are such that any perpetuation of color distinctions would have been impossible, and attitudes must be sought by conversation. Mogadiscio is a city without color lines and has been for a long time, although there are racial prejudices among the total of Somalia's citizens, Somali for Bantu (Hamitic for negroid). There is virtually a total lack of the Anglo-Saxon attitude and conviction on which political progress in East Africa still stumbles, but to the extent that it does exist in Somalia, it has its reliquary among the older Italian officials and planters who learned their trade when Italy was there to rule. I mark this point not to make an unscientific generalization about Italians, but rather to indicate a difference that seems supportable in subjective evidence between the prewar colonialism and postwar tutelage of Italy in Somalia.

When Mario di Stefano was appointed the Administrator of Somalia two years ago, to be Italy's last colonial official in modern times, his terms of reference had an obvious overhanging theme. It was to conclude Italy's trusteeship neatly and efficiently and with as much credit to Italy as feasible. No foreign office would ask less, nor expect less of one of its senior ambassadors. Di Stefano, a short round man with an air of sharp shrewdness, was born in Palermo--a member of what is known as the "Sicilian clique" in the Foreign Office in Rome, which is a distinction that had more meaning 20 years ago than it does now. Such terms imply to Italians who like to generalize about regional characteristics certain qualities: the Sicilian is by nature devious in private--mafioso is the Italian word--grandiose in public. Whether true or not, the image sticks, and di Stefano has not escaped the regional characterization in Somalia either among his own Italian deputies or among the foreign observers who have watched him operate for two years. It is true that he had surrounded himself with



Administrator di Stefano.

other Sicilians, and it seems to be true that in the race to establish a reasonably stable government in Somalia, elections were not altogether according to the rules; and it is also true that the convention which he sponsored and at which I was an uninvited observer was a somewhat grandiose effort to memorialize the Italian effort in Somalia. However, these elements seem to me and to many Italians to be, if not irrelevant, unimportant in the total achievement of Italy which cannot, perhaps, be measured except in the broadest of terms.

Italy itself is not yet a whole nation of homogeneous people, nor is it, despite its phenomenal growth in the last decade, the most advanced nation of the Western world. Its lack of homogeneity is reflected in the charge of "Sicilianism" against the final administrator, its lack of wealth in the political hurdles an Italian ministry would face in any major enlargement of its contribution to Somalia. Nevertheless, within these limitations, Italy has offered itself in these last expiating years of the trusteeship with good will that has been recognized by the Somalis. They seem to entertain little enmity against or favoratism for Italy although they do, in contrast, have a hopeful realism regarding other outsiders, and notably the British, who offer them help for the next step in their national progress.

In general, I am inclined to agree with Administrator di Stefano, to whom I paid my respects the day I left Somalia. He expressed a thoughtful expectation that Somalia would conduct itself with reasonable maturity on independence and rather surprisingly humbly summed it up, I thought:

"We have done our best and looking over Africa, I do not feel that we were any worse than the rest [of the colonial powers] in our history here and in our own way perhaps better than some of the others."

The assessment he offers is unprovable, but being Italianate it has its style in being less a measure of economic progress or of accepted political institutions than of individual humanity. The Italy that has left its noble mark on history will not have failed to have left some nobility behind in Somalia.

E. A. Bayne

[Photos: Fotocine, Mogadiscio, and E. A. Bayne.]